Synagogue and Sunday School Architecture

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BY
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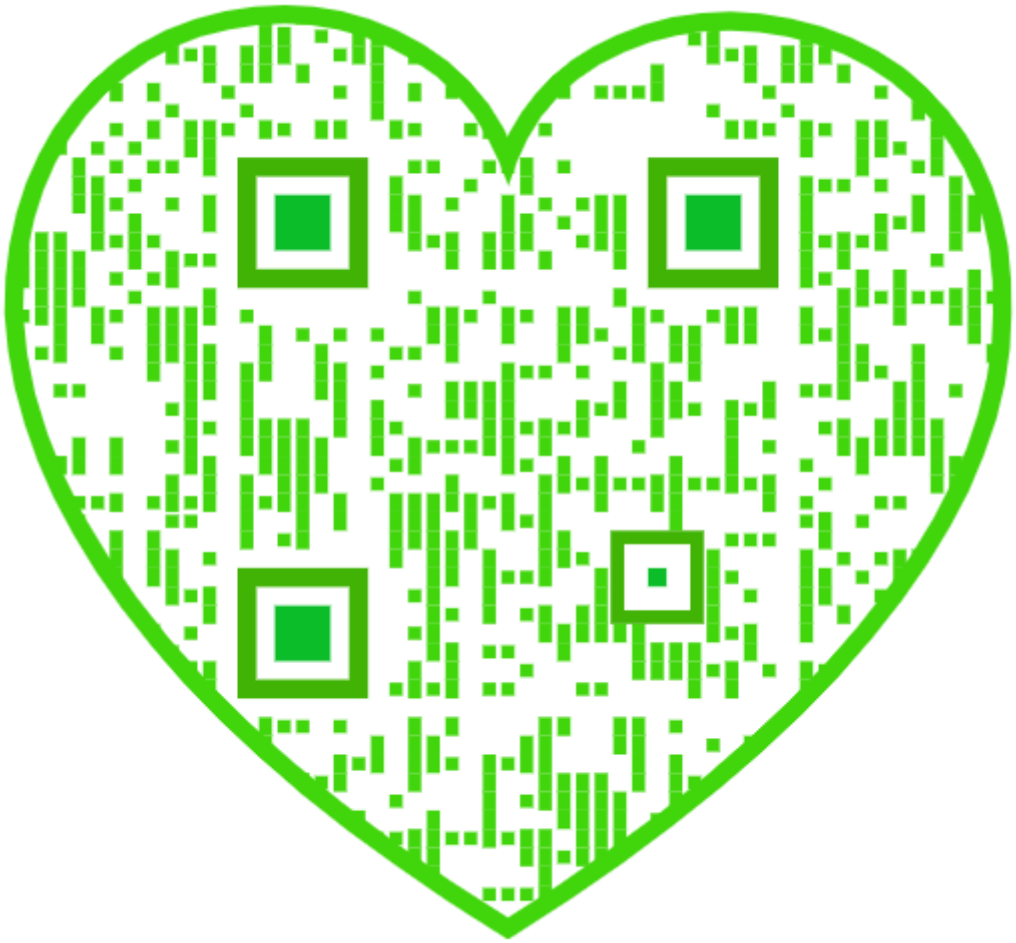
NEW YORK



SYNAGOGUE AND SUNDAY SCHOOL ARCHITECTURE

By

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NEW YORK

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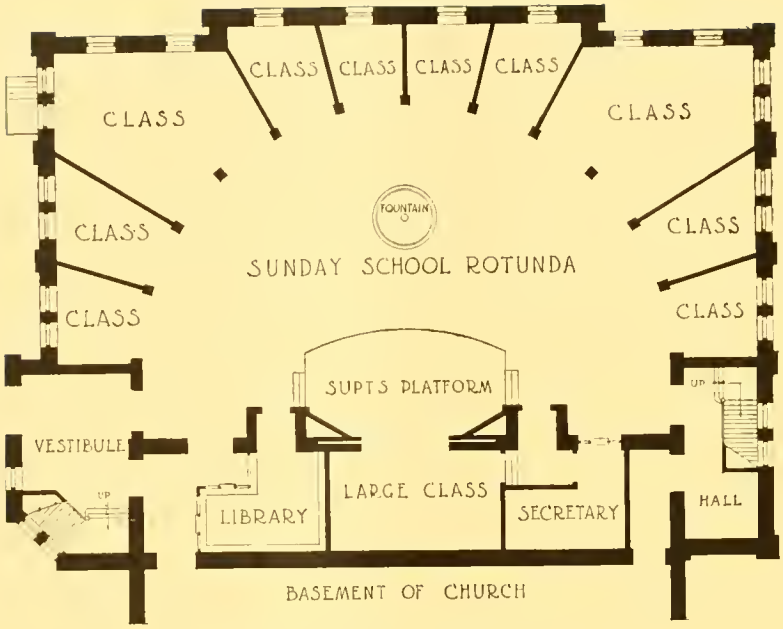
SYNAGOGUE AND SUNDAY SCHOOL ARCHITECTURE

At the very outset I must ask your kind indulgence, firstly for a layman entirely unaccustomed to speak or even read in public, especially before a body of men to whom public speaking is second nature, and secondly in the event of repeating details with which you may already be quite familiar.

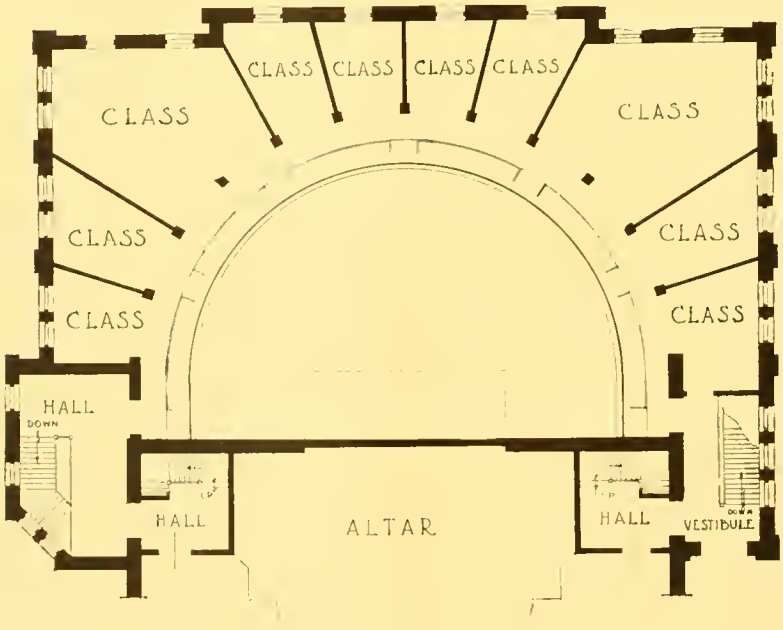
On the other hand, I wish to express before going further, my very sincere appreciation of the privilege you have accorded, in allowing me to address you. To show my gratitude I have tried to bring you a message that I hope may prove of some assistance in your noble work of cultivating not only in the Jewish child, but in the Jewish adult as well, a religious spirit and an appreciation of the glorious heritage we hold from those God-inspired men who founded our religion.

My message to you is of a dual nature in that it must deal with the practical and also with the aesthetic. Every building should combine these two qualities. Even such a utilitarian structure as a factory, in which the practical is of primary importance can be so designed that it will possess the quality of beauty, if only in its proportions or mass, or in the grouping of its windows. At the extreme opposite end of the various types of modern structures stands the religious building, whether Sunday School or Synagogue, and here the practical and the aesthetic run such a close race that it becomes difficult to decide which quality should be considered first in importance. In no other type of building would I for a moment hesitate to place practical considerations first, but the more I study the problem of the religious school building the more I am convinced that there is such a thing as making it too coldly practical, and with a corresponding loss of the very quality that is most desirable for the effect it will create in the mind of the child. In making this statement I have in mind the Sunday school in vogue for some forty years, and built on what is known as the Akron plan, in which a number of small, irregularly shaped and usually poorly lighted and poorly ventilated class rooms are grouped in circular form around a large Assembly Room, but divided from it and from each other by movable partitions or curtains so that all may be thrown into one for the general exercises. You are probably familiar with this type, but will find such a plan among those here presented (Plate No. 1). Before this plan was invented the suggestion was made that an ideal arrangement of rooms should "provide for togetherness and separateness" so that the classrooms and the assembly room could be thrown together or separated in a moment. But this resulted in a sort of compromise plan, as unsatisfactory as all compromises. in which to my mind there was neither complete togetherness nor complete separateness. Many may call it a practical plan, but it is really a sort of trick plan and such arrangements are not in keeping with the teachings of a religious school. Moreover, whether the pupil takes note of it or not, the effect of study in rooms no two sides of which are parallel (as is the case in the original Akron plan) can only be mentally disturbing to say the least. Further developments of the basic idea of this plan led to various combinations in some of which the assembly room of the Sunday School could be opened into the main auditorium of the church, thus combining the two, but most of these plans look as though they were designed by engineers rather than by architects, and the aesthetic side of the problem has been entirely swamped in the struggle to get in everything at once and to operate the whole combination by the pressing of a button to move the dividing partitions up, down or sideways. The whole idea is lacking in dignity and suggests the theatrical. To use a somewhat homely illustration it reminds one of those "multum in parvo" tool sets that you may have seen, in which many little tools have a common handle and are contained in that handle. At first glance this seems eminently practical and convenient, but even with one of these combinations at hand the probabilities are that when you wish to drive a real nail you go forth and borrow, or buy a real hammer, with its own handle. It is difficult to convince the layman that one can be too practical just as one may be too aesthetic, but I repeat that in a religious building above all others the aesthetic or the spiritual qualtity is of very great value.

Fortunately the Akron plan and its offspring are being hard pushed today and there is coming a sane return to first principles and an appreciation of the fact that a good class room should be an independent room, well lighted, ventilated and heated, with parellel and plastered walls and opening on a public corridor or hallway; also that the assembly room should have a similar treatment, so that each of these units will meet the demands made upon it in a satisfactory manner, with no infringement of the functions of one upon those of the other. With these two fundamental units, the class room and the assembly room as a basis, numberless combinations are possible and the resulting plan must depend entirely on the special conditions in each case, so that no general type covering all cases can be given. It is at this point that your architect must exercise his ingenuity to give you a working arrangement of rooms that will best suit your needs, and it is of the greatest importance that you inform him beforehand of the exact manner in which your Sunday School is conducted, giving him all the details possible, for example, whether your general exercises are held at the beginning, the middle or the end of the session, as this will probably have a bearing on the relative location of class rooms and of coat-rooms. Other details of operation will affect the disposition of other rooms, but the architect should be told of these in time so that he may plan intelligently.



MAIN FLOOR



BALCONY FLOOR

THE ORIGINAL AKRON PLAN

G W KRAMER ARCHITECT N·Y CITY

Plate No. 1

It would be wise to have at least one member on the building committee who is entirely familiar with the requirements of the Sunday School so that none of these may be overlooked. To the assembly room and the required number of class rooms may be added, according to the needs or the means of your congregation a library, a teacher's room, an exhibition room, possibly also a ladies meeting room, and a kitchen. Or your building may with the addition of club rooms, gymnasium, swimming tank, locker rooms, bowling alleys, etc., develop into a community house.

When the Sunday School can be housed in a building either separated from or forming the rear portion of the Synagogue the problem is comparatively simple, for we then approach the ideal condition. To illustrate such a case, I have presented the plans of the new Temple B'Nai Jeshurun of Newark, (Plate No. 2), in which the main features of the school building are the assembly room seating 380 on the ground floor, and on the second and third floors the twelve class rooms accommodating thirty pupils each.

No Sunday school should ever be located in a basement. It is bad practice from every viewpoint, and I hope the day may soon come when no building committee will consent to such an arrangement. Of course it will be said that funds are not always sufficient to procure the ideal, but even in such a case the class rooms at least should be above ground even if the assembly room must be below. Such an example is here shown in a plan offered in a report of the *Canadian Commission on Religious Education* (Plate No. 3) and provides for the care of about one hundred pupils. The space below the main auditorium of the church is used for the assembly room, (Plate No. 4), but the class rooms are in two stories entirely above ground at the rear. This is not a bad plan at all, yet I feel that in such a case as this it would be of greater benefit to the pupils in every respect if they were taken into the main auditorium for the general exercises. Still another plan of the *Canadian Commission* you will see here, but making provision for from 200 to 500 pupils and having some of the features of a community house in that the space under the main auditorium is used for a swimming tank, with locker rooms and dressing rooms for boys and girls, and a bowling alley (Plate No. 5). At the rear of the basement is a large gymnasium, which is also used as an assembly room, partly below grade and having two stories of class rooms above (Plate No. 6).

As a final illustration I have had a reproduction made of a plan that shows many interesting features in the portion devoted to the religious school. It has been called the "*Cedar Rapids plan*," and while it was designed for a Christian house of worship it shows an arrangement of rooms that could be equally well adapted to one of the Jewish faith. I would not wish, however, under any circumstances to see the circular form of auditorium used for a synagogue, but this portion of the building could equally well be made rectangular without in any way affecting the arrangement of rooms at the rear of the building. Although an assembly room with stage is here provided for in the basement, (Plate No. 7), it is intended more for entertainments, whereas the general exercises of the religious school are held in the main auditorium above (Plates No. 8 and No. 9).

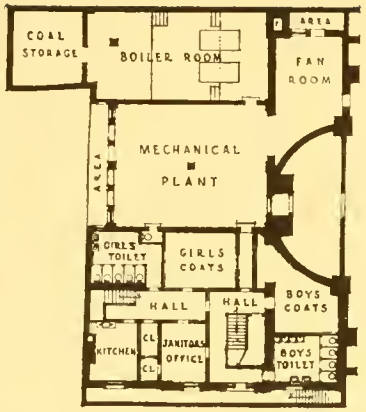
The Sunday School building whether it be connected with the Synagogue or separate should be constructed along the lines of the most modern public school buildings in which great progress has been made in recent years. Fireproofness of materials with standpipe and hose connection, fire alarm bells, fire escapes and numerous exits, with an occasional fire drill are all of great importance. Light and good air are primary requisites, and it is most desirable to have the rooms mechanically ventilated, especially during the winter months when windows must remain closed. The health, comfort and safety of the children is just as important during these few hours on Sunday morning as it is during their attendance at public school on week days.

The assembly room will naturally have a platform or stage at one end, and it is desirable to have also at each side of the stage a small dressing room or retiring room. At the opposite end of the room provision might be made for an attachment to the electric wiring system of a motion picture machine. Seats in this room should be movable so that it may also be used for dancing or dining. If a kitchen is installed it should be placed convenient to the assembly room for efficient and quick service when that room is used as a banquet hall, and ample dumb-waiter service should be provided if the kitchen is not on the same floor with the assembly room.

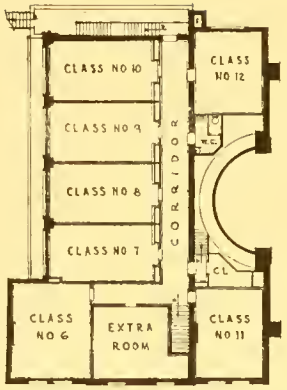
In regard to minor accessories such as class room furniture, blackboards, coat racks, etc., etc., I will only say in passing that a reference to the manufacturers catalogues will assist in the selection of the required equipment, also that the installation of a vacuum cleaner will be found a desirable convenience.

During the summer months when the Sunday School is not in session and when attendance at the regular Friday and Saturday services is likely to be small, it may be found advisable to hold these services in the assembly room, in which case a temporary Ark may be placed at the back of the platform, or a small Ark could be built into the rear wall of the stage and concealed when not in use.

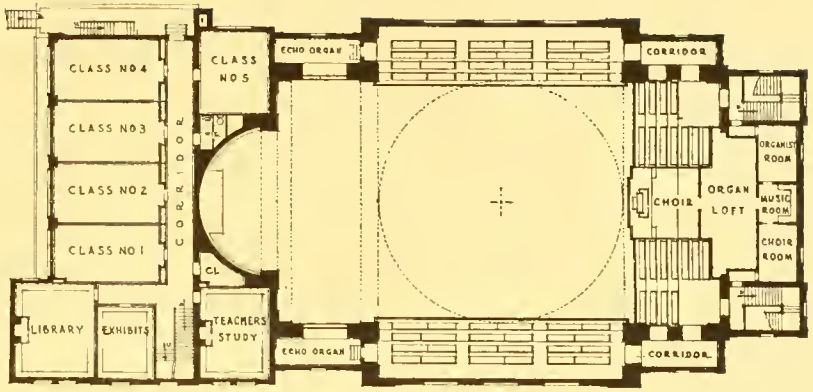
And this leads me to the discussion of the decorative treatment of the assembly room, in fact of all the rooms of the religious school building, and with it the consideration of the aesthetic side of the problem, which should have at least equal weight with the practical in this type of the building. Altogether too little attention is given to the treatment of the interior of these buildings, and but little attempt seems to be made, especially in the more



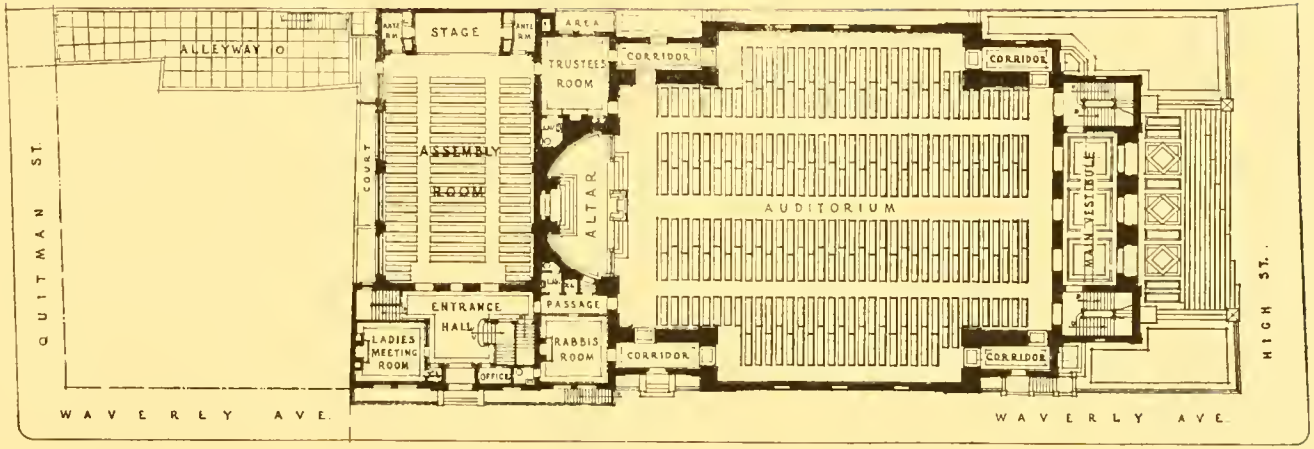
BASEMENT PLAN



THIRD FLOOR PLAN



GALLERY FLOOR PLAN

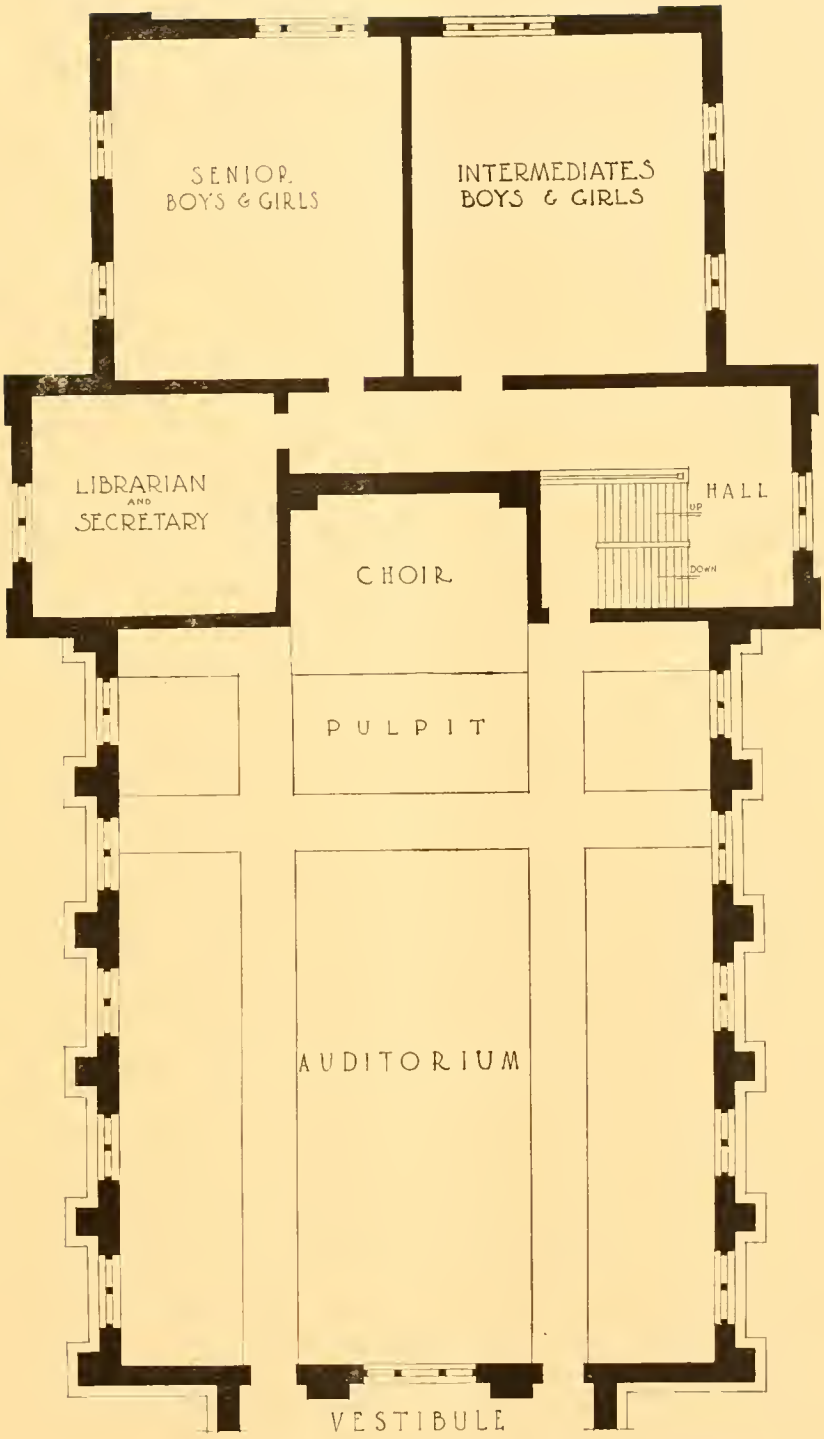


FIRST FLOOR PLAN

Plate No. 2

TEMPLE B'NAI JESHURUN, NEWARK, N. J.

ALBERT S. GOTTLIEB, ARCHITECT

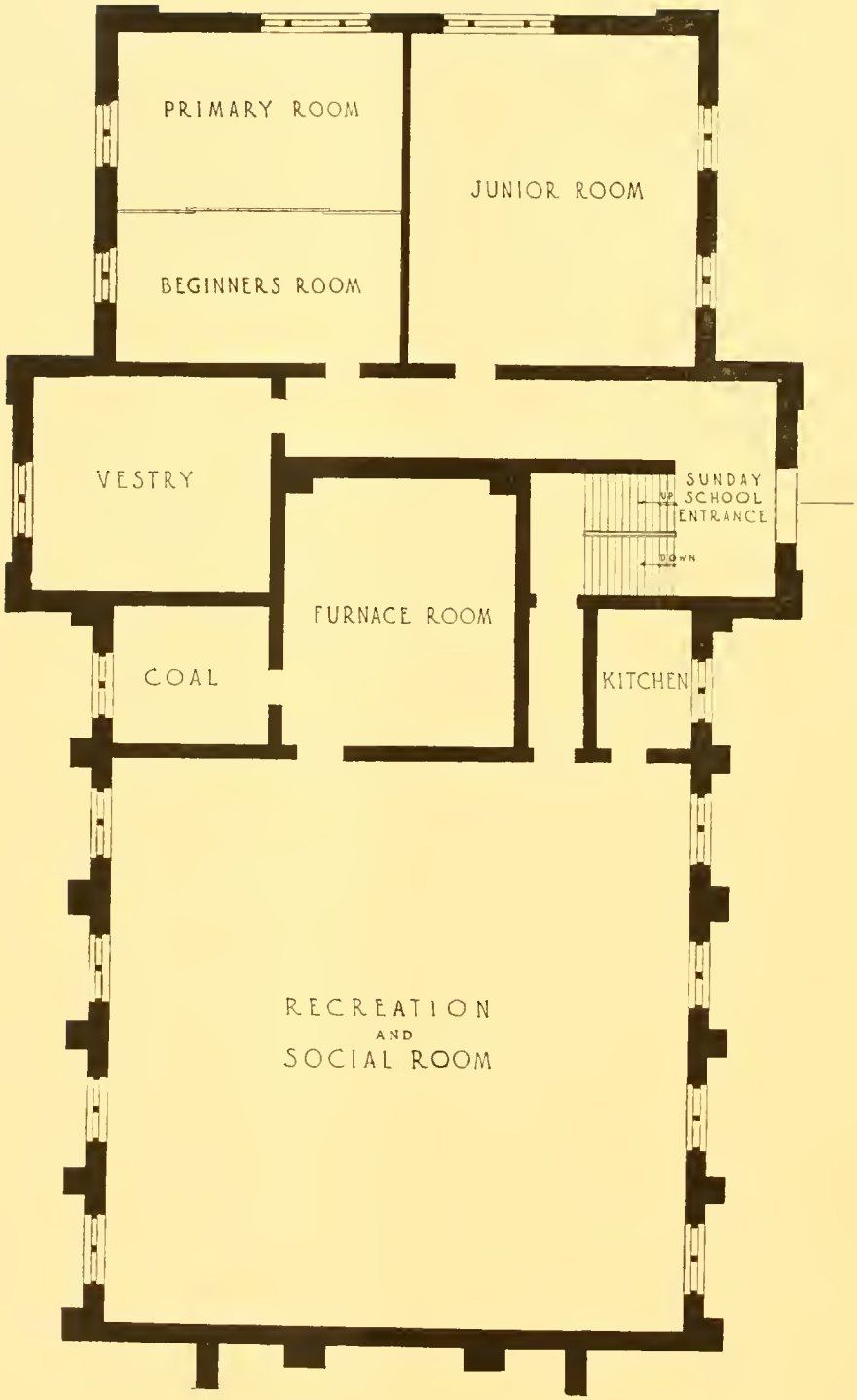


• MAIN FLOOR PLAN •

• CANADIAN COMMISSION PLAN •

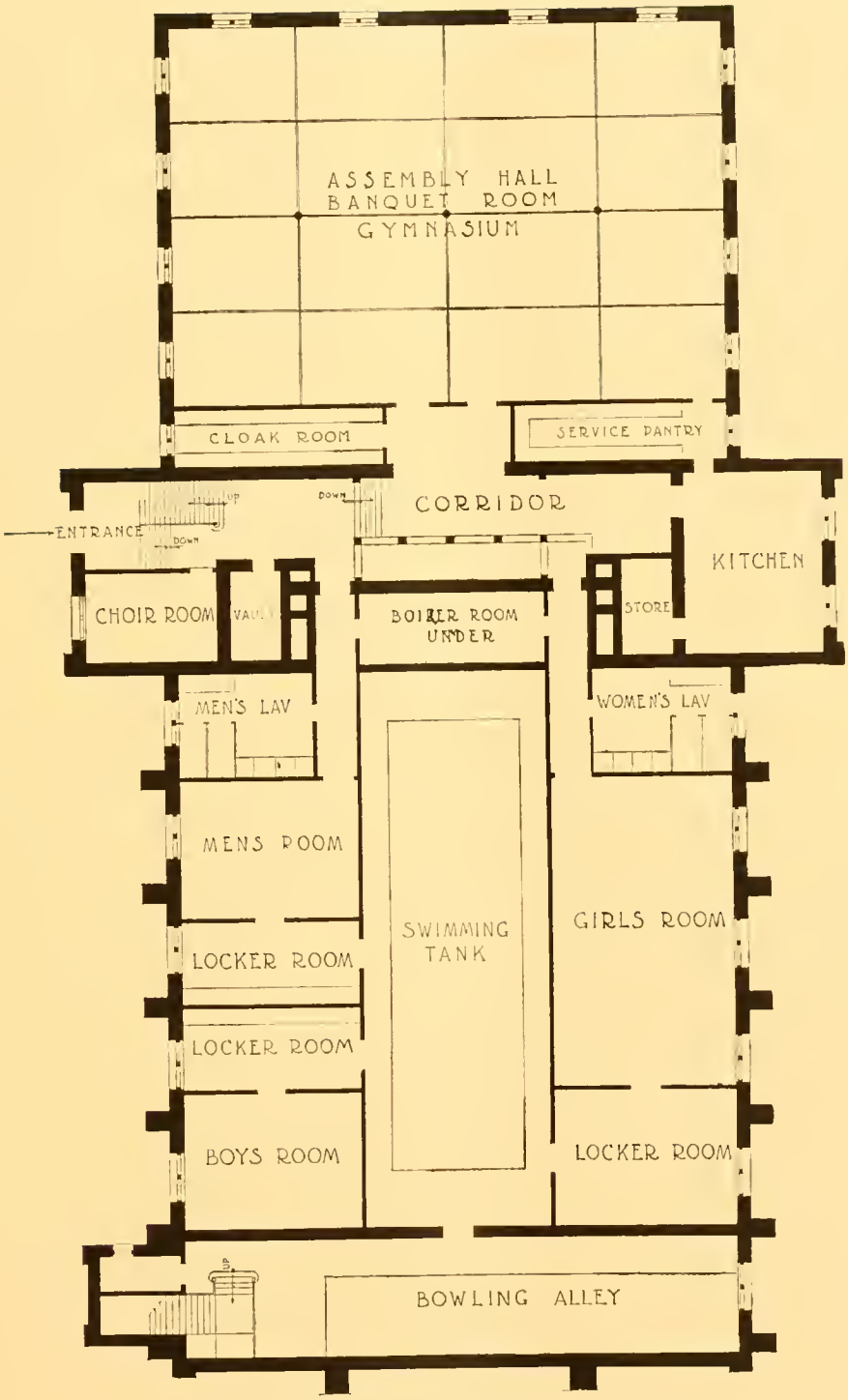
• SHARP & BROWN • ARCHITECTS • TORONTO • CAN •

Plate No. 3



GROUND FLOOR PLAN.
CANADIAN COMMISSION PLAN.
SHARP & BROWN ARCHITECTS TORONTO CAN.

Plate No. 4

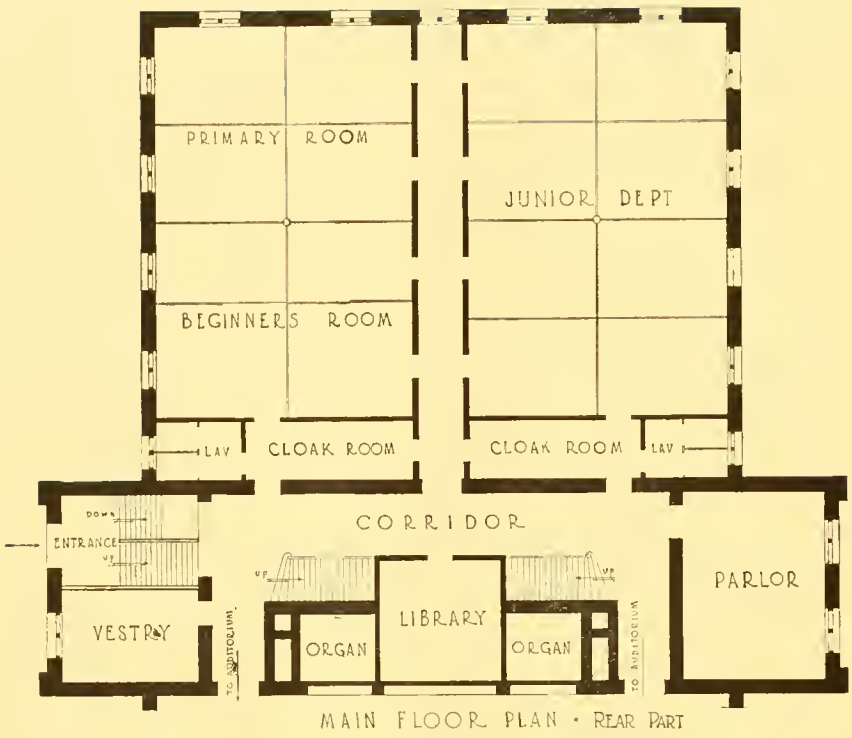


·GROUND FLOOR PLAN·

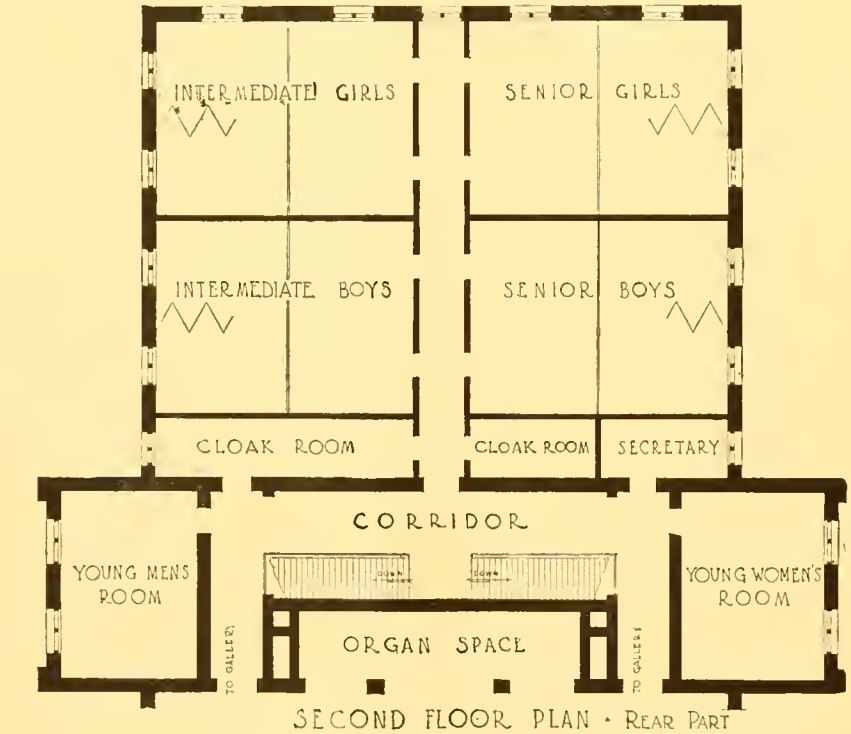
·CANADIAN COMMISSION PLAN·

·SHARP & BROWN·ARCHITECTS·TORONTO,·CAN·

Plate No. 5



MAIN FLOOR PLAN · REAR PART



SECOND FLOOR PLAN · REAR PART

CANADIAN COMMISSION PLAN

SHARP & BROWN ARCHITECTS TORONTO CAN

Plate No. 6

modern Sunday school buildings, to give them the proper atmosphere. The problem here is quite different from that of designing a public school, for we are now considering a religious school in which are to be taught subjects of a different character from geography or mathematics. We all know how impressionable the child is, and if its surroundings in the Sunday school reflect something more of the spirit with which you seek to inspire it by your teachings it cannot but aid you in your task. It has even occurred to me that this result would be greatly furthered if the children were taken for the general exercises into the Synagogue auditorium where the solemnity of their surroundings would make even a deeper impression on them than the average assembly room, which they know is often put to various secular uses such as card parties or dances, and the nondescript character of which is not likely to make the least impression on their minds. It seems to me that this idea of making the Sunday school express equally with the Synagogue a religious spirit is too often entirely overlooked. To translate this spirit in terms of building materials and furnishings should be the aim of the architect, and it will make great demand not only on his skill as an artist, but it will above all call for a keen appreciation of the requirements and a deep sympathy with the object to be achieved.

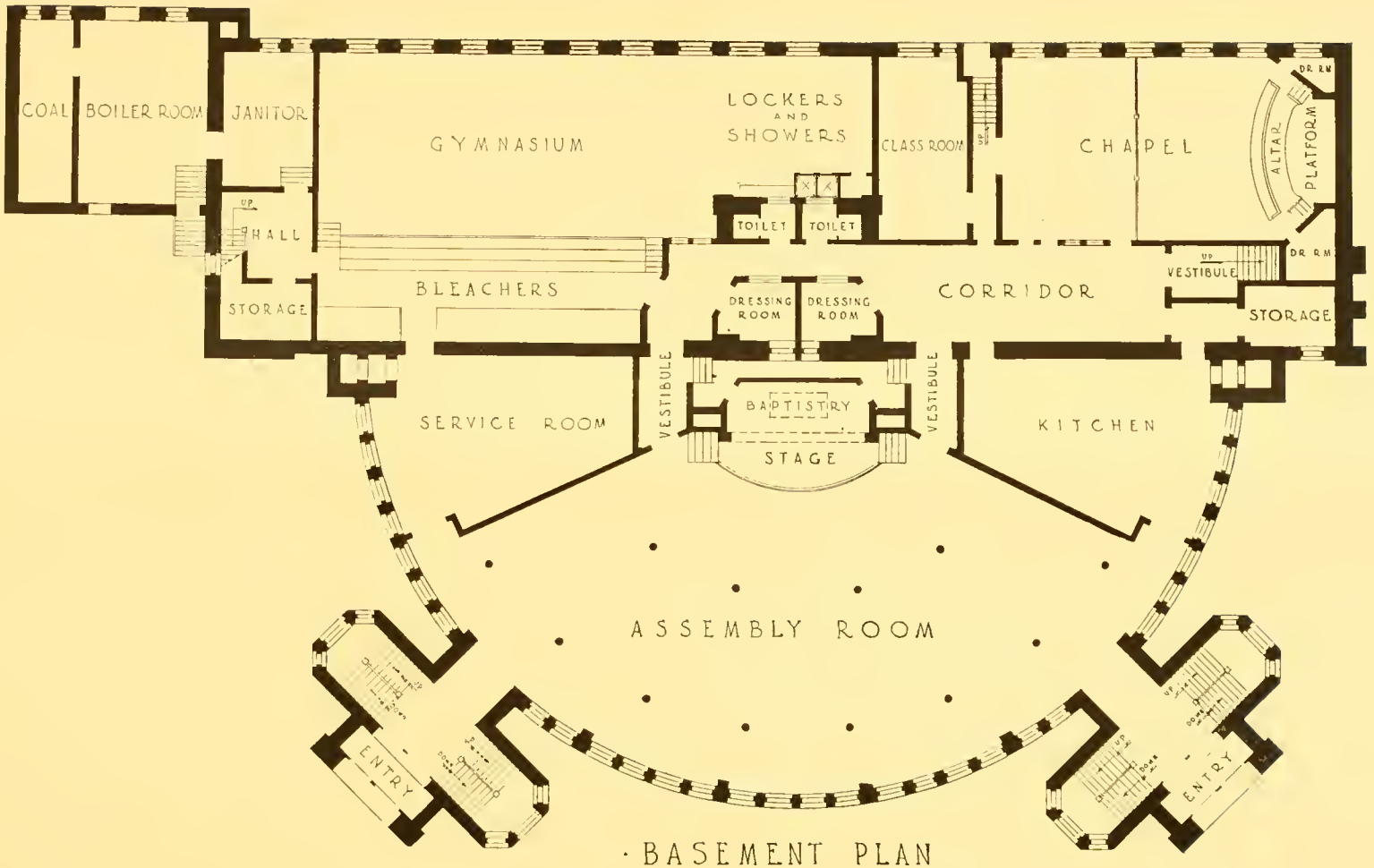
The interior of the Sunday school in decorative treatment, or perhaps it would generally be more accurate to say in the lack of it, should not resemble that of the public school. It is first, last and always a religious school, and it should instantly express itself in that sense to anyone who enters it. Careful study should be given to color tones of walls, and to the selection of furniture of the proper character as well as to the pictures to be hung upon the walls. The ensemble should be dignified and serious, and entirely in harmony with the atmosphere of the Synagogue itself, of which it forms so important a part.

And now, at the risk of appearing to step outside the natural boundary of the subject of this paper, I simply cannot resist the desire to say a few words before closing on the question of Synagogue architecture in this country. After all, if you will stretch a point and consider the Synagogue the religious school in which you teach your lessons to the adults of your congregation my digression may be more readily pardoned. The subject is very close to my heart and I wish to bring it forth for your future consideration with all the earnestness at my command.

There is today a woeful lack of harmony in the style of Jewish houses of worship, whether Synagogue or Temple, in the United States, and it is truly deplorable that it should be so. We have a religion that embodies all those qualities, which if adequately translated into terms of architecture, would eventually and inevitably result in monuments of the greatest dignity and inspirational force. Yet what do we find? Synagogues in the Moorish style, in Egyptian in the pagan classic, and even in the style of Louis XVI! I confess that in all my study of the subject I have been unable to discover any reason why the architecture of the period of this monarch however celebrated should be adopted for a Jewish synagogue. Fortunately the Moorish and the Egyptian have but little vogue today, but the reproduction of the Roman or Greek classic temples still continues. The prototypes of these buildings were devoted to the worship of pagan deities. What have we in common with them? Moreover, this is the style now extensively used throughout the country for Christian Science churches. No one man alone has ever created a style of architecture, but all styles are a matter of evolution. I wish only to urge that we cease the adoption of inappropriate styles that have nothing in common with our religion, nor ever did have, and make at least a beginning in another and more rational direction, so that in time our religious edificies may properly express something of the true character of our religion, and so that a stranger visiting your city may recognize at once the Jewish house of worship and not mistake it for a Christian Science church, a bank building, or anything but what it is.

I would wish to see placed well in evidence on the exterior of our Synagogues the tablets of the law on which our religion is based, just as the Christians place on the highest pinnacles of their churches the cross of Christ, which is to them the symbol of their faith. On the interior I would strongly condemn the present tendency to substitute theatre or opera chairs either in straight rows or still worse, in curved ones, for the far more dignified straight pew, and in straight rows. To my mind the interior of a Synagogue is a holy place and should contain no furnishings suggestive of the theatre. We go to it for worship or contemplation, not to be entertained. I am familiar with all the arguments put forth on behalf of the opera chair, but I feel that not one of them should be listened to for a moment. One other interior arrangement that I should wish to see discontinued as being totally wrong is the placing of the choir on top of the Ark. The Ark is the Holy of Holies and should be the focal point of every Synagogue or Temple. To allow your singers to walk over it or behind it impresses me as little less than sacrilege. It is one of those arragements that I would consider entirely too practical. If we wish to maintain in our Synagogues and our Temples a truly devotional atmosphere and such a one as to inspire piety and reverence in our people, it can never be achieved by such means as these.

I have seen in the public prints but a single reference to this subject written editorially only last year by the late Dr. Joseph Jacobs in which he said, in part, that in every city where Jews are located "there will be a building to which the inhabitants can point and say, That is the Jewish Synagogue, or Temple, as the case may be. If these buildings are dignified and unostentatious, free from excessive ornament, and yet distinctive and characteristic, the general reputation of



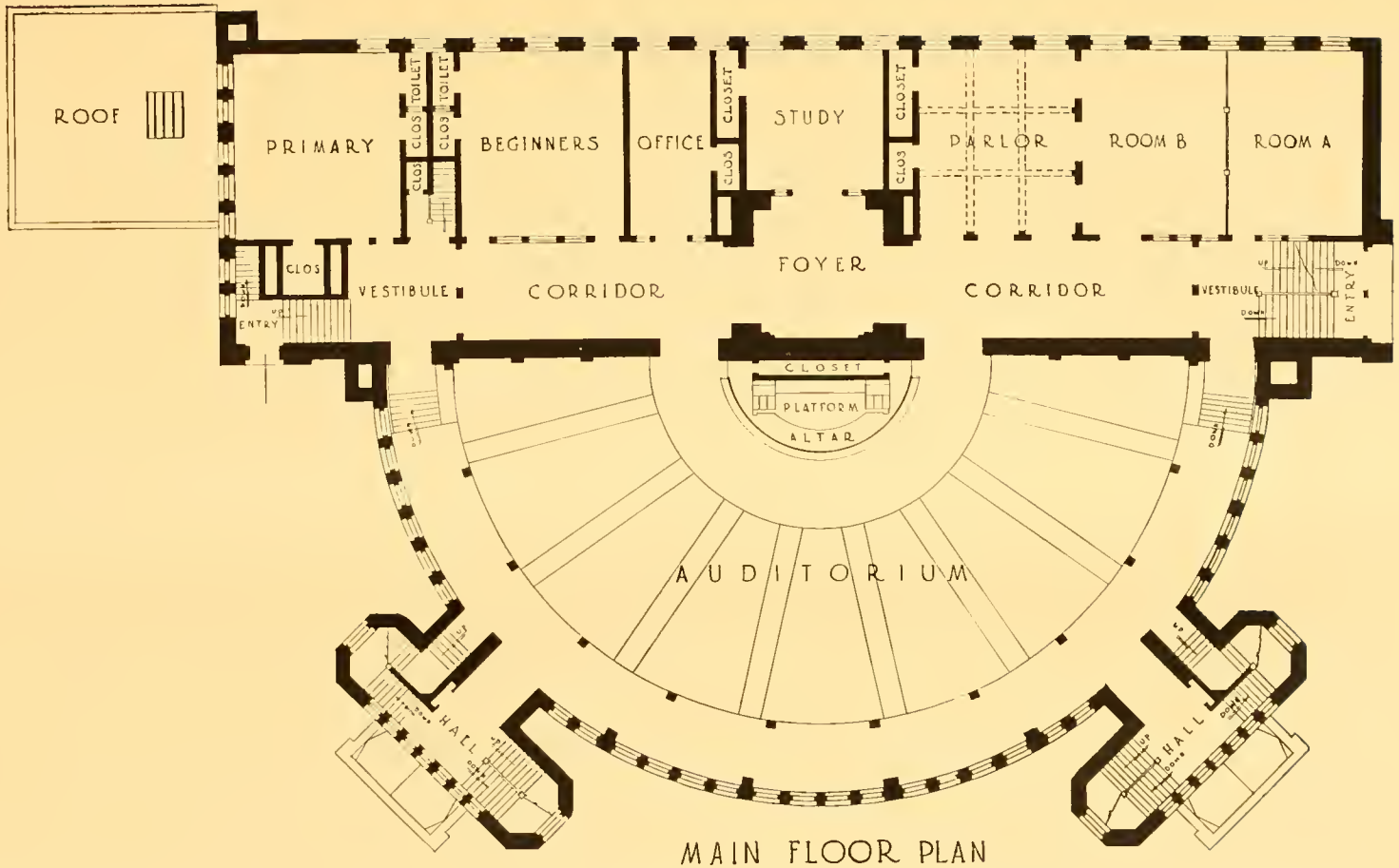
· BASEMENT PLAN

· ST PAULS METHODIST CHURCH ·

· CEDAR RAPIDS · IOWA ·

· W · C · JONES · CONSTRUCTING · ARCHITECT ·

Plate No. 7



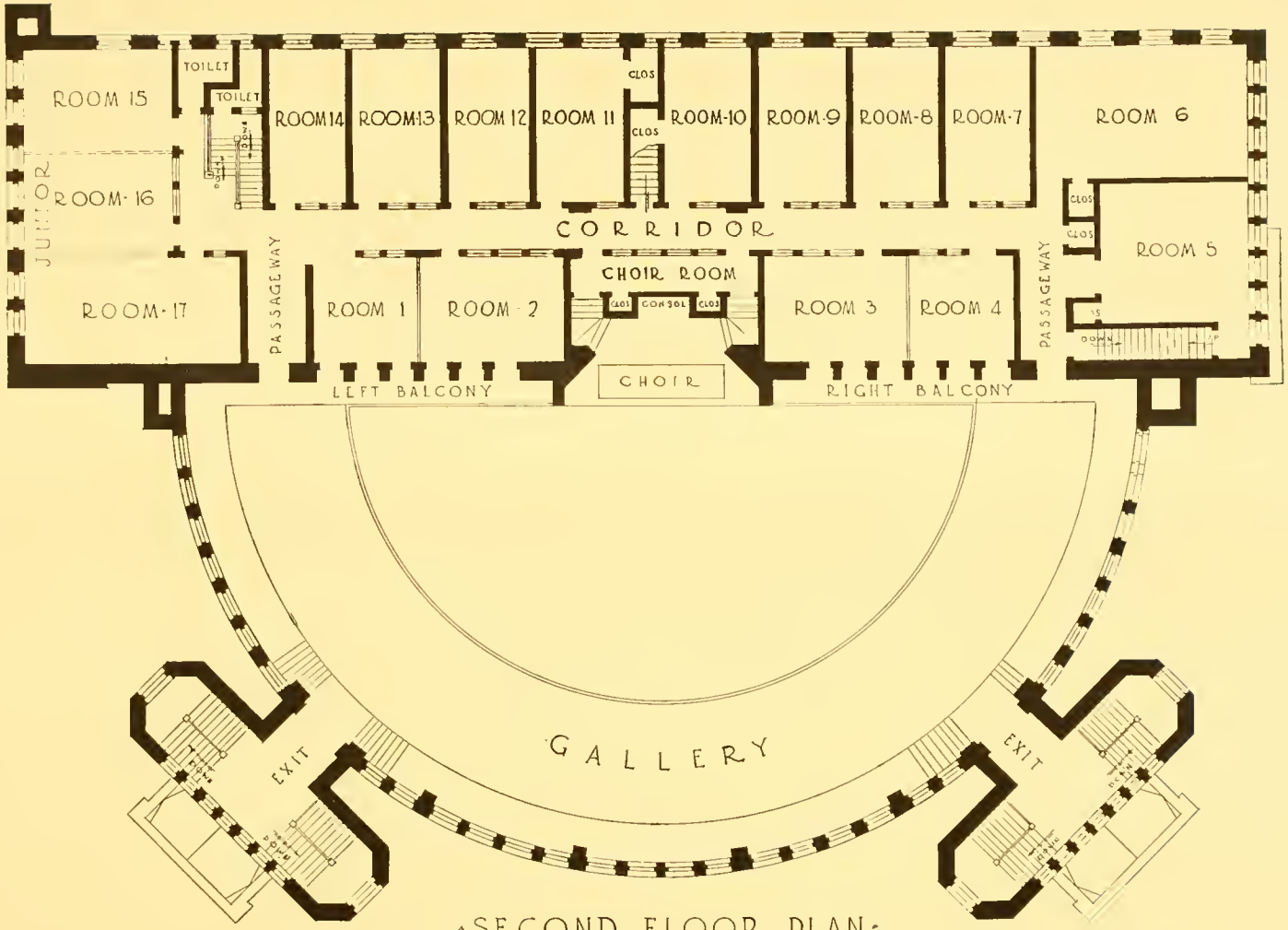
MAIN FLOOR PLAN

ST PAULS METHODIST CHURCH

CEDAR RAPIDS IOWA

W C JONES CONSTRUCTING ARCHITECT

Plate No. 8



SECOND FLOOR PLAN

ST PAULS METHODIST CHURCH

CEDAR RAPIDS · IOWA

W · C · JONES CONSTRUCTING · ARCHITECT

Plate No. 9

Jews will be so much the gainer. Just as men judge other men on first introduction by their apparel, so they judge religious communities by their place of meeting. Both the Roman Catholic Hierarchy and the Episcopalian Church are aware of this tendency, in man's mind; and it is not for nothing that the cathedrals dedicated to St. Patrick and St. John in this city (New York) are among the most prominent architectural erections within its limits." Furthermore, he suggests that both rabbis and wardens or trustees should make a study of the simple elements of architectural beauty in order to check the vagaries of the architect should any such appear in his plans.

If, however, our Synagogues and Temples are designed in the true spirit of our religion we shall then produce houses of God in which prayer will be "unconsciously induced" through an art that appeals to the fixed ideals of beauty in the minds of humanity, and your people "will find themselves wandering not only at the appointed hour, but at any hour into that splendid silence of the Temple where they may and will find peace."

SYNAGOGUE ARCHITECTURE

Can a Purely Jewish Style be Developed in the Building of Our Temples?

Structure Should Express Spirit of Faith

By

ALBERT S. GOTTLIEB

Member of the American Institute of Architects

NEW YORK

Reprint of an Article written for the Passover Number of The American Hebrew

April 14th, 1916

STRUCTURE SHOULD EXPRESS SPIRIT OF FAITH

When an architect starts to design a building, one of the first questions that arises is in what style or of what period shall it be. What he should ask himself is how can he best express in brick or stone the character and purpose of the building, to which should be added in the case of a religious edifice, how best to interpret the spirit of the particular relgion to which it is to be devoted.

In the case of the Jewish religion this is a task of unusual difficulty, for the Jews have never had an architectural style peculiar to their own belief. This seems strange, especially in this country, when one considers the large number of Synagogues and Temples erected here, where perfect liberty of expression and execution is allowed to the designers of these buildings. In other countries and in other times they were hampered and restricted, but that has hardly been the case in America except perhaps in the very earliest days of the country's history. Therefore, it seems all the more strange that no distinctive style has ever been adopted here or any serious attempt made to evolve such a style.

In other lands the Jew has always adopted the style of the country in which he lived, and one can see in various parts of Europe Synagogues that are Romanesque, Gothic, Moorish, Classic, Byzantine, in fact in almost every known style. This has been spoken of by one writer on the subject as an evidence of the remarkable adaptability of the Jew. True enough, but although he built his house of worship in various styles, his form of worship, his belief, and the fundamental principles of his religion remain practically unchanged throughout the ages. Why, therefore, should not his Synagogue be at least in as great a degree as possible an expression of the spirit of his own religion, instead of an adaptation of the style of a different religion?

The very first Synagogue in this country was the Touro Synagogue at Newport, Rhode Island, built in 1763. It was in the pure Colonial style of the period, and full of grace and charm, but these qualities would hardly be named as dominant characteristics of the religion of the Jew. Next came an important Synagogue at Charleston, South Carolina, built in 1840, and this was quite a faithful reproduction of a Greek Temple. But the Greeks were pagans, worshipping many gods, and why should the Jew adopt their form of architectural expression, however beautiful it may be? Following this, other Synagogues sprung up throughout the country, some of them Egyptian, and many in the Moorish style which for a number of years was the prevailing style.

This style was adopted on account of its suggestion of Orientalism and to recall the glories of the Jews in Spain under the Caliphs. Fergusson in his history of architecture calls it "a very ornate but rather flimsy style of art" and says that "the Moors were scarcely an architectural people in the proper sense of the term. Their mosques were, so far as we know them made up of fragments of classical temples arranged without art or design. Their palaces were ornamented with plaster work of the most admired complexity of design, colored with the most exquisite harmony, but all this was the work of the ornamentalist, hardly of the architect."

Why should the Jew ever have chosen a style so "ornate but flimsy" by which to express his religion architecturally? This question must have suggested itself to others for the Moorish period was followed by a sort of Classic revival in which the Greek-Roman pagan temples came back, and to my mind with only slightly less inappropriateness than the Moorish mosque. The claim has been made for it that it was the style in vogue in Palestine after the fall of Jerusalem as has been inferred from ruins of synagogues found in Galilee, but it must have been an adopted style even at that time, and I can see no logical reason for perpetuating it. Moreover, this is the type of building that has been adopted in recent years for most of the Christian Science churches throughout this country.

I am well aware that no man can by himself create a new style of architecture. This always has been and always will be a matter of slow growth, of evolution, but we can at least try to take a step in a different direction. Perhaps without reproducing in detail any particular style we can make our houses of worship represent as nearly as possible what to my mind are the chief characteristics of the Jewish faith; solemnity, dignity, grandeur, nobility, and withal simplicity and clarity. Furthermore, we should not hesitate to place well in evidence on the building the tablets that represent the moral laws upon which the Jewish religion is founded. The Christians place on the highest pinnacles of their churches the cross of Christ, which is to them the symbol of their faith. Why should not the Jew give equal prominence to the Tablets of the Law that Moses gave to him, and in fact to the world, for a guide and a support?

The day is past in this country at least when the Jew must build his house of worship lower, or less conspicuous than that of others, or in some restricted district, for fear of persecution. It is my earnest hope that he will now and hereafter seriously attempt in the design of his Synagogues and Temples to give a truer expression of his faith, for we shall then be assured of architectural monuments whose dignity and beauty will be equalled only by that of his faith.

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PAST AND FUTURE

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April 11, 1919

SYNAGOGUE ARCHITECTURE — PAST AND FUTURE

It is a well-known fact that nations or peoples express in their architecture, consciously or unconsciously, the degree of civilization or culture to which they have attained, and in the details of the arrangement of their buildings are indicated their habits and customs so that the archaeologist by studying the structures of any given period can determine quite clearly the position in the scale of social or cultural development reached by the group producing these edifices or monuments just as the paleontologist, given certain bones of some prehistoric animal, can with reasonable accuracy reconstruct the skeleton of that animal and perhaps even arrive at a fairly accurate statement of its mode of life and the probable period of time in which it lived and thrived. Right here in America we have before our own eyes in every large city the very best illustration possible of this fact, for wherever there stands what is popularly called one of our "skyscrapers" we see the embodiment of the very special force that expresses better than anything else our great achievements in the industrial life of the world. There is nothing like it in Europe, nor anywhere else, for it is peculiar to these United States and to our development as a nation.

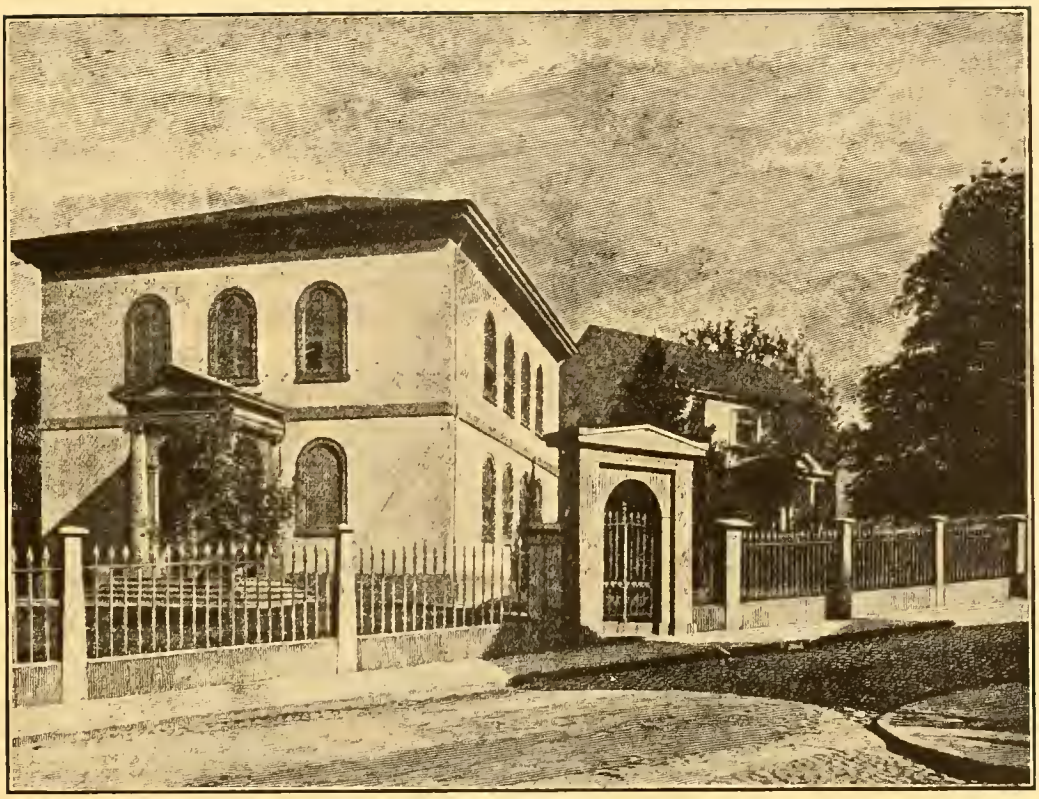
Now starting with the first statement of fact as a premise, and with which every student of architectural history must agree, one might at once conclude that in order to follow the development of the religion of the Jews all that should be necessary is to study the evolution of their houses of worship. Curiously enough this would lead us nowhere and we have here an anomaly that is most unusual and at the same time most interesting. Perhaps in a sense the anomaly is only apparent and when explained more fully this divergence from the original statement will only serve to further confirm its truth.

The Jews never developed an architecture of their own, and for two reasons. First, because they have been for centuries so scattered throughout the world that there never was the opportunity for concerted thought and study by a sufficient number of minds under uniform conditions and in any given locality to create any distinctive art such as an architectural style, and second, because until comparatively modern times, perhaps one might limit it to even less than the past one hundred years, the Jew was suppressed to such a degree that he was not permitted to build his house of worship as he might have wished or attempted for fear of arousing the enmity of his Christian neighbors only to be followed by their inevitable persecutions.

In Holland, where as early as the sixteenth century religious toleration was so broad that people came from all over Europe to enjoy this precious freedom, and among these came Jews from Spain, Portugal and Germany, yet they were not permitted to worship publicly but were compelled to foregather only in private houses and in out-of-the-way places or in back streets. If they were able to build an edifice for religious purposes they might make the interior as rich or as full of emblems as they pleased but the exterior must be made to look just like an ordinary house front. But the Catholics as well as the Pilgrim Fathers were subjected to the same restrictions, for only the Reformed or Protestant Christian religion was tolerated in public. The same conditions were imposed when in the very early days of the history of New York City a group of Jews desired to purchase property for a Synagogue. They were allowed to take possession only with the restriction that the building should look like a private house, that it must have a chimney and a kitchen and that the members of the congregation must enter and leave the premises through the rear yard leading to a back street! With such fetters in the communities even so tolerant what hope could there be for the development of a distinctive style of architecture for the Synagogue?

As time passed, however, and greater liberty was allowed to the Jews in their places of worship there came to be built in 1763 the earliest Synagogue still standing in this country at Newport, Rhode Island, known as the Touro Synagogue and erected and maintained through the efforts of the Touro family, of which Judah Touro was the chief member. The building is quite small, about thirty feet by forty feet, and was designed by Peter Harrison, an architect well known in Boston and New York. It is in the pure Colonial style of the period with a very simple exterior and charming interior which suggests, perhaps only in its arrangement, the use for which it was intended, for it does not deviate in a single line or molding from the accepted style and has not a trace of any special expression characteristic of the religion of the occupants.

Perhaps the most important Synagogue next erected in this country was the one at Charleston, S. C., built in 1840, which was quite an accurate reproduction of a Greek temple. Many others have been built since in a similar style, but while the prototypes of the Greek temples were of great beauty and dignity there can be no logical reason why they should be adapted for use as Synagogues, for the people who originally worshipped in them were pagans praying to many gods, whereas the Jew acknowledges but one God. In addition to this argument against their use by Jews is the fact that the majority of Christian Science churches all over the country have been built in this style, or a slight modification of it. During another and later period of development there came into being Synagogues in the Moorish style and this is said to have been chosen for its suggestion of Orientalism and to recall the glory of the Jews in Spain under the Caliphs, but here again we borrowed from or imitated another people and at that a race that produced ornamentalists rather than architects, and given to complexity of design with much coloring. Here again we find no logical reason for such a treatment



Touro Synagogue, Newport R. I., Built in 1763

applied to express the extreme simplicity and dignity of our religion. In addition to the chief styles above enumerated there were others, including the Egyptian, Byzantine and Romanesque as well as some of mixed character, spread throughout the country according to the fancy of the individual designer and apparently without rhyme or reason. Many of them have not even an emblem or other indication to show that they are Jewish houses of worship or to differentiate them from buildings of some other class. And this is true not only here in America but in Europe as well, for in Germany, Italy, Russia and other countries may be found Synagogues without any deviation whatever from the architectural style of those countries.

Now let us see what lessons we may learn from the situation as outlined in this very brief survey of the conditions throughout the world. We here in America are now free as the air we breathe to design and build our Synagogues and Temples as may please our fancy without restrictions as to location, form, size, height or any other attributes or qualifications, and above all without fear. What an opportunity is here opened up for development such as we have never before possessed and why should we not grasp it eagerly that we may at last express freely and naturally in our houses of worship the spirit of our religion instead of servilely copying the outward expression of other creeds with which we have nothing in common? The architects have here a truly unique situation without limitations and it will be indeed unfortunate if they fail to take advantage of it. While it is not possible for any individual to create unaided an original architectural style and which always must be a matter of evolution, yet if a start be made in the right direction by attempting to adequately translate into terms of architecture the noble qualities embodied in our religion it could not fail eventually and inevitably to produce structures of the greatest dignity and inspirational force.

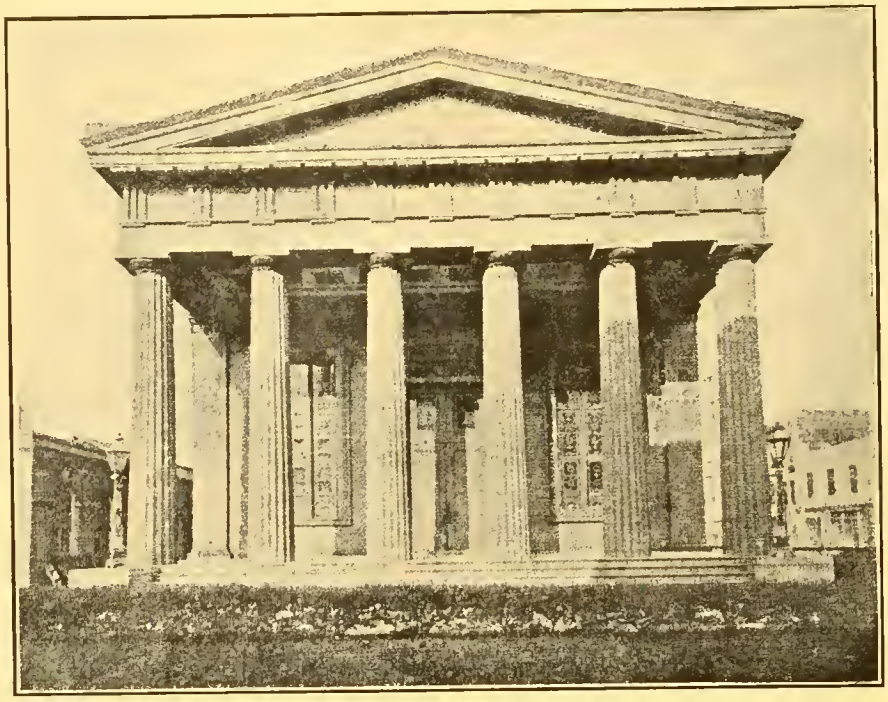
But whatever forms may be used for this expression there are certain details of arrangement which should be adhered to without question. In the interior the Ark should be the focal point to which all interest must converge without detraction. The plan so often adopted of placing the choir in a gallery above the Ark is entirely wrong from a sentimental standpoint, if no other, for the Ark is the Holy of Holies and to permit the singers to stand or walk over it is nothing short of sacrilege. The choir should be concealed at any other point in the interior where their voices may be heard but their persons will not be visible to the congregation. Richard Wagner with his masterly musical mind well knew the importance of eliminating everything that might distract attention from the stage setting and action, and there-

fore in his production of Parsifal at Bayreuth he entirely concealed the orchestra from the view of the audience, thus producing a sensation of mysticism in the listener. While this comparison may seem an odd one yet this theory is entirely applicable to our own case. The use of theatre chairs instead of pews in any religious building is unpardonable. They detract from the dignity of the interior and suggest the place of amusement. We go to the synagogue for contemplation and prayer, not to be entertained. One of the most effective features in Christian churches is the introduction of stained glass in the windows, representing incidents in the lives of the saints or the apostles and there would seem to be no reason why in the reform Jewish temples similiar windows should not tell the stories of the Old Testament for the edification of both young and old and to beautify the interior by their rich coloring. The electric lighting of the interior should be subdued in tone and the lights concealed wherever possible. Glaring white lights detract from the solemnity of the service and should always be avoided. Among other interior embellishments would naturally be the perpetual lamp, seven branched candelabrae, the symbol of the Mogen David and others disposed in such manner as to give character and expression to the decorative treatment.

On the exterior of these buildings there should be placed in a prominent position the Tablets of the Law representing the contribution of Moses and the Jews to the advancement of the world just as the Christians place on the pinnacles of their churches the cross of Christ, which is to them the symbol of their religion.

No matter what style of architecture may be developed for our Synagogues and Temples it would seem that the few suggestions given above should be scrupulously adhered to in every one of our houses of worship, for this would at least lead to a uniformity of treatment that would become typical and characteristic.

In conclusion it may be of interest to quote from an editorial article on this subject written just four years ago for THE AMERICAN HEBREW by its eminent editor, Dr. Joseph Jacobs, who fully appreciated the great importance of the development of a more dignified treatment of the Jewish house of prayer and who in looking into the future of the many communities where such houses are still to be erected stated that "there will be a building to which the inhabitants can point and say, 'That is the Jewish Synagogue,' or Temple, as the case may be. If these buildings are dignified and unostentatious, free from excessive ornament, and yet distinctive and characteristic, the general reputation of Jews will be so much the gainer. Just as men judge other men on first introduction by their apparel, so they judge religious communities by their place of meeting. Both the Roman Catholic Heirarchy and the Episcopalian Church are aware of this tendency, in man's mind; and it is not for nothing that the cathedrals dedicated to St. Patrick and St. John in this city (New York) are among the most prominent architectural erections within its limits."



Synagogue at Charleston, S. C., Built in 1840